



Institute of Marine
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November 23, 2009

The Honorable Frank LoBiondo
U.S. House of Representatives
2427 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman LoBiondo:

Thank you for your continued support of the Delaware Bay Oyster Revitalization project. I am writing to express Rutgers' support for the Army Corp of Engineers' request for language in the 2010 Water Resources Development Act to establish Delaware River Estuary Ecosystem Restoration project. This project's authorization and subsequent funding will allow for a quick response by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to help expedite restoration initiatives in collaboration with numerous states, local and non-governmental organizations in the Delaware Bay and River watershed.

An example of this need is the shell-planting program established in 2005 that seeks to revitalize the oyster stocks of Delaware Bay through a two pronged strategy: (1) enhancement of recruitment and (2) maintenance of the ecology of the bay by sustaining the oyster reef. The onset of Dermo in 1989, a product of global warming of the Mid-Atlantic, doubled natural mortality rate and thereby jeopardized the future of the oyster industry and the critical oyster reef habitat of the bay by decreasing oyster abundance and limiting the addition of shell that is essential to maintain the integrity of the oyster reef itself. In 2000, the estuary began an unprecedented series of low-recruitment (few baby oysters) years that drove oyster abundance to record low levels, endangering the long-term health of the estuary and crippling an important industry supporting jobs in the most impoverished regions of the states. The Shellfish Councils of Delaware and New Jersey, both state regulatory agencies, along with their oyster industries, Rutgers and other academic and non-profit institutions in Delaware and New Jersey, bayshore community organizations, and the Delaware River and Basin Commission began a bi-state shell planting program in Delaware Bay in 2005. This program addressed the decline in oyster abundance by enhancing recruitment and adding shell to counterweigh the loss of shell imposed by the effect of Dermo disease on the oyster's population dynamics.

The result of this project has been an increase in the oyster resource, a stabilization of the shell bed, and most importantly, an increase in oyster harvest with concomitant economic benefits for the bayshore towns and townships of Delaware and New Jersey. The program has demonstrated a laudatory return on tax-payer investment of at least \$25-30 for every \$1 of public investment and has permitted expansion of the industry, thus creating new jobs in the most impoverished region of the state, while maintaining sustainability of the oyster resource.

Establishment of a rapid response capability to expedite restoration initiatives is critical to maintaining the ecological health of the second largest bay on the east coast and the economic health of the bayshore communities. This type of challenge will only continue as global warming continues to modify the bay habitat through climate change. We strongly support the



Army Corp of Engineer's request and urge that the Delaware River Estuary Ecosystem Restoration funding authority be established in the 2010 Water Resources Development Act.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "F. Werner", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Francisco E. Werner
Director